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By: Sgt. Edward Eagerton

**Alaska Guard celebrates National Guard birthday, holidays**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — For many, this is a time for friends and families to come together and celebrate with one another before welcoming in the new year.

The Alaska National Guard took time to celebrate this month's holidays and to commemorate the 378th birthday of the National Guard in multiple events here, Dec. 11-13. The events included a ceremony, an afternoon luncheon and a family holiday party.

At both the ceremony and the luncheon, Brig. Gen. Mike Bridges, acting adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard, presented attendees with a celebratory cake after giving a speech on the history of the National Guard.

The National Guard traces its roots back to 1636 when the militia first organized in Salem, Massachusetts, said Bridges. Since then, the National Guard has participated in every major conflict since the Revolutionary War.

"We stand ready to defend our state and nation," he said. "I'm proud of the things we've accomplished."

The following day, at the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing holiday luncheon, Guard members, retirees, contractors, families and friends gathered to celebrate the holidays with a lunch, Christmas costume and tacky-sweater contests, and a raffle for prizes.

There, Col. Blake Gettys, commander of the 176th Wing, thanked the members of his unit for their service and wished them happy holidays before he joined other senior enlisted and officers in serving lunch to their fellow Airmen.

On Saturday morning, members of Family Programs put on a family holiday party at the National Guard armory, which included games, arts and crafts activities, and visits with sled dogs brought in by Maj. Jennifer Casillo, an aircraft maintenance officer with the 176th Maintenance Squadron, and co-owner of Battle Dog Racing.

"This is an event for all National Guard families," said Joan Boltz, lead child and youth program coordinator, with the Alaska National Guard's Family Programs. "We have crafts,

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like snowflake making, because who does that anymore? We do crafts that people can take home with them, things they can do together as a family for years to come.”

Children were able to play with the sled dogs and some Alaska Husky puppies, and were also given the opportunity to pose for free photos with Santa Claus.

Local restaurants Tastee Freeze and Hard Rock Cafe provided treats for the children during the party.

“It’s a good time for the kids, and a way for families to connect,” said Boltz.

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**For photos, please visit the flickr album linked below:**

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157649362229007/>